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Item 6.3 of the Provisional Agenda

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FOOD SECURITY ADVISORY PANEL

ON THE AFRICAN CRISIS

World Commission on Environment and Development

Advisory Panel on Food Security, Agriculture,  
Forestry and Environment

Interim Recommendations to WCED on the  
Food and Ecological Crisis in Africa

1. Introduction

The Advisory Panel at its first meeting, held in Geneva on May 12/13 1985, gave detailed consideration to the short and long term implications of the African Food Crisis and decided to make the following interim recommendations to WCED for its consideration at its next meeting in June 1985. The Panel hopes that its recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible by the concerned Governments/bilateral/UN agencies.

2. Basic Guidelines

Protecting the livelihood of the poor, ensuring livelihood to the destitutes and very poor, providing basic goods and services in rural areas and optimising the benefits of existing educational and developmental infrastructure are the most urgent tasks. Helping the poor to earn their daily bread has to be the primary strategy for promoting economically and ecologically sustainable development. Also, steps to develop food security systems will have to be based on the following basic facts:

- (a) More than enough food is already produced in the world to provide a balanced diet for all its inhabitants
- (b) People with purchasing power seldom go hungry
- (c) Small and subsistence farmers will not produce more than what they need for themselves, unless they are assured cash and/or goods acceptable in exchange for the surplus
- (d) Food imports by predominantly agricultural countries will have the same impact as importing unemployment, since imports will lead to keeping local farmers at low levels of productivity and employment
- (e) Youth and the poor constitute the two genuine majorities in most developing countries. Hence, any development plan for sustainable development based on sound principles of ecology and economics which fails to involve them both as participants and beneficiaries is unlikely to yield the expected benefits.

3. Recommendations

The following four sets of recommendations are offered for immediate consideration and implementation:

A Food Security

(a) Food aid and emergency relief

We commend the on-going efforts in providing the needed food aid and other forms of assistance to the drought stricken countries. Such assistance has helped to save many lives and has provided the breathing spell necessary for the initiation of agricultural and ecological rehabilitation efforts. We expect that continued efforts will be made to achieve a well-integrated programme of relief operations, capable of reaching everyone in need of help.

(b) Incentives to small producers: Programme for the supply of cash and basic goods

Renumerative prices coupled with the supply of basic goods such as clothing, salt, soap, blankets, cooking oil, matches, sugar, batteries, parafin, paper, pencils will help to stimulate small farmers produce and earn more. We hence recommend that out of the amount available for emergency relief, a certain proportion may be reserved for purchasing at renumerative prices surplus produce from small producers. Both cash and the basic goods farm families need can be given in exchange for locally produced agricultural commodities. The food grains thus procured may be utilized within that country for operation of "Food for Work" programmes for assetless agricultural labour families.

The basic goods to be supplied may include not only consumer and household goods but also farm inputs like seeds, fertilizers, etc. If such a small producers' incentive plan is intelligently prepared and imaginatively implemented, there will be an immediate upward swing in agricultural production and productivity in many African countries.

A self replicating and propelling growth pattern can be hastened by using external aid to end the prolonged need for such aid.

B Livelihood Security

The Livelihood Security plan will have to cover poor farmers and farm labour with particular attention to women and small producers. Assests such as land, livestock and trees are usually sold by the poor in years of acute distress and they thus become assetless. The challenge lies in preventing such distress sales. There is need for a multi-pronged strategy for Livelihood Security consisting of:

- (1) enabling poorer households to own assests such as goats, sheep, poultry, cattle and trees
- (2) introducing an Employment Guarantee Scheme for unskilled labour such as the one operating in the Maharashtra State of India, which is a chronically drought prone State, and
- (3) developing and popularising technologies which can help to generate more on-farm and off-farm employment and income.

C Agricultural and ecological rehabilitation

Even as human life saving operations are in progress, no time should be lost in initiating steps for strengthening the ecological infrastructure essential for sustained agricultural advance. A National Ecological and Agricultural Rehabilitation Plan should be developed for this purpose in each country. Such a plan should consist of a portfolio of well defined tasks. Once the tasks to be implemented are carefully defined, steps should be taken to identify the most appropriate agency (Government, non-governmental, bilateral, UN or other multilateral agencies, etc.) for implementing each specific task.

Such a "Task Adoption" approach will help the country to derive the maximum advantage from the specific expertise and competence of different national and international agencies. The aim should be the integration of external and internal inputs in a manner that the benefits from all available institutional, technical and financial resources are optimised. The proliferation of programmes and agencies should be avoided. An integrated national Eco-development and Agricultural Rehabilitation Board with representation to all the task adopting agencies should be set up.

D International Eco-development Corps for Africa

We recommend the immediate organization of an Eco-development Corps of young professionals for helping to find effective solutions to location specific problems. There is urgent need for developing location specific technologies and approaches for agricultural rehabilitation and eco-development in Sahelian countries. Generalised prescriptions and programmes should be avoided, since they do more harm than good. Present patterns of technical assistance are very expensive and cannot be replicated on a scale necessary for generating a critical mass of meaningful efforts. The following will be some of the principal characteristics of the International Eco-development Corps for Africa:

- (1) The Corps would consist of young professionals preferably in the age group 20 to 30 drawn from the concerned countries in Africa and from all over the world. They will thus be joint teams of nationals and foreigners. The persons selected for serving on the Corps should have a combination of desirable professional skills and personal qualities, particularly humility and compassion.
- (2) The African Eco-development Corps should constitute a special component of the UN Volunteers Programme but will be administered under the guidance and direction of an International Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). TAC will consist of eminent scientists, technologists, educationists, social scientists and development administrators known both for their knowledge of African problems and their concern for harnessing science for the welfare of the poor.
- (3) The members of this African Eco-development Corps should serve on a modest honorarium and should look upon the opportunity given to them as an opportunity for learning and service.

Conculsion

We believe that through concerted efforts in promoting ecologically and economically sound food production plans coupled with steps to ensure livelihood security to the poor and remunerative prices to the small producers, the present crisis can be converted into an opportunity for rapid advances in agricultural progress and agrarian prosperity. By tapping the imagination, know-how and commitment of young professionals both from developed and developing countries in the challenging task of making hunger a problem of the past in drought ravaged Africa, we will not only help Africa but will release a unique opportunity of working and learning together.

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